

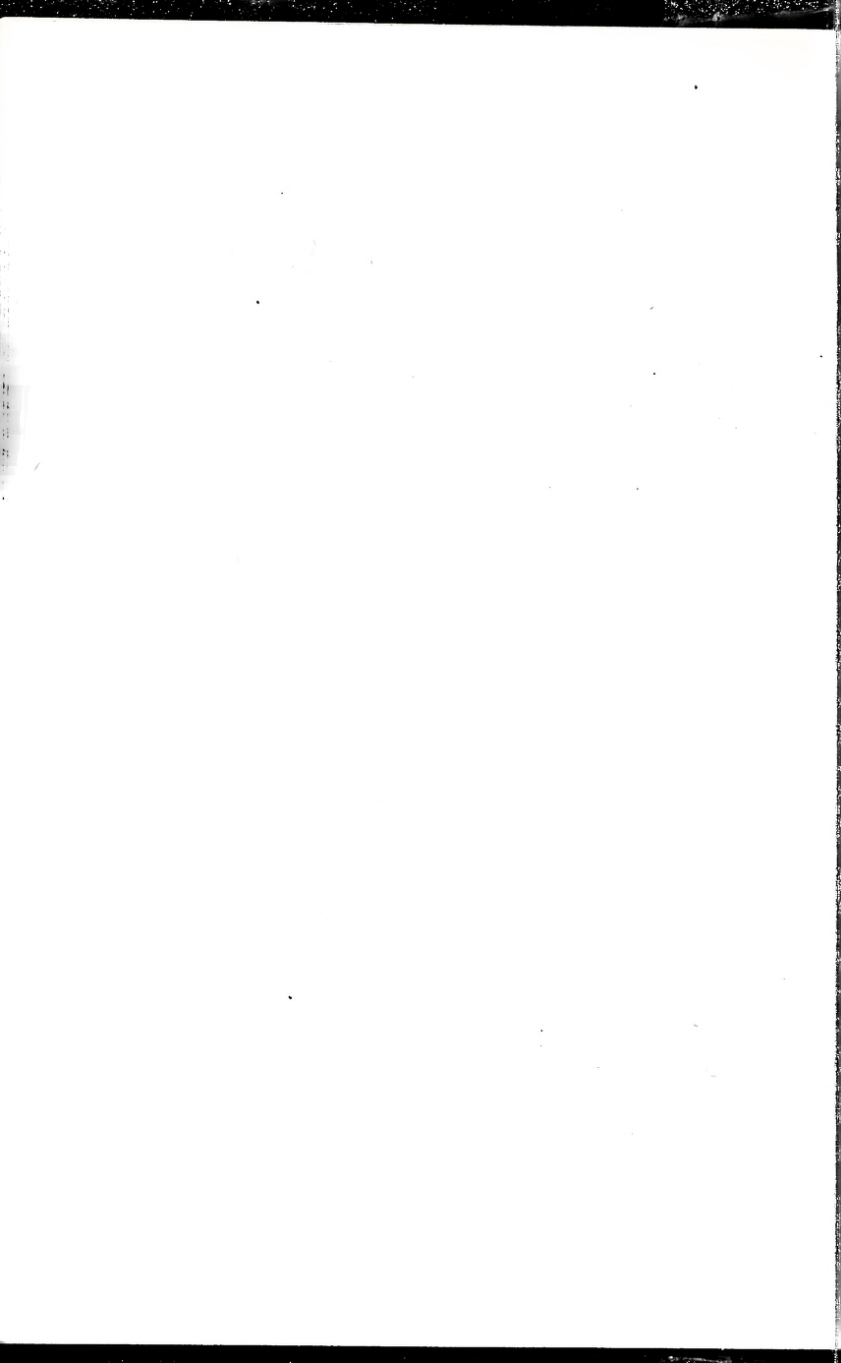
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ON THE
MEDIATION AND SALVATION
OF
ECCLESIASTICAL CHRISTIANITY.



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ON THE MEDIATION AND SALVATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL CHRISTIANITY.

THE whole Christian scheme turns on the assumption of the inherent necessity of some one standing between the Creator and the creature, and shielding the all-weak from the power of the All-mighty. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God:" such is the key-note of the strain which is chanted alike by Roman Catholicism, with its thousand intercessors, and by Protestantism, with its "one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus." "Speak *thou* for me," cries man to his favourite mouthpiece, whoever it may be; "go *thou* near, but let me not see the face of God, lest I die." The heroes, the saints, the idols of humanity have been the men who have dared to search into the Unseen, and to gaze straight up into the awful Face of God. They have dashed aside all that intervened between their souls and the Eternal Soul, and have found it, as one of them quaintly phrases it, "a profitable sweet necessity to fall on the naked arm of Jehovah." Then, because they dared to trust Him who had called them into existence, and to stretch out beseeching hands to the Everlasting Father, they have been forced into a position they would have been the very first to protest against, and have been made into mediators for men less bold, for children less confiding. Those who dared not seek God for themselves have clung to the garments of the braver

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souls, who have thus become, involuntarily, veils between their brother-men and the Supreme. There is, perhaps, no better way of demonstrating the radical errors from which spring all the so-called "schemes of redemption" and "economies of Divine grace" than by starting from the Christian hypothesis.

We will admit, for argument's sake, the Deity of Jesus, in order that we may thus see the more distinctly that a mediator of any kind between God and man is utterly uncalled for. It is mediation, in itself, that is wrong in principle; we object to it as a whole, not to any special manifestation of it. Divine or human mediators, Jesus or his mother, saint, angel, or priest, we reject them each and all; our birthright as human beings is to be the offspring of the Universal Father, and we refuse to have any interloper pressing in between our hearts and His.

We will take mediation first in its highest form, and speak of it as if Jesus were really God as well as man. All Christians agree in asserting that the coming of the Son into the world to save sinners was the result of the love of the Father for these sinners; *i.e.*, "God so loved the world that *He* sent His Son." The motive-power of the redemption of the world is, then, according to Christians, the deep love of the Creator for the work of His hands. This it was that exiled the Son from the bosom of the Father, and caused the Eternal to be born into time. But now a startling change occurs in the aspect of affairs. Jesus has "atoned for the sins of the world;" he "has made peace through the blood of his cross;" and having done so, he suddenly appears as the mediator for men. What does this pleading of the Son on behalf of sinners imply? Only this—a *complete change in the Father's mind towards the world*. After the yearning love of which we have heard, after this absolute sacrifice to win His children's hearts, He at last succeeds. He sees His children at His feet, repentant

for the past, eager to make amends in the future; human hands appealing to Him, human eyes streaming with tears. He turns His back on the souls He has been labouring to win; He refuses to clasp around His penitents the arms outstretched to them so long, unless they are presented to Him by an accredited intercessor, and come armed with a formal recommendation. The inconsistency of such a procedure must be palpable to all minds; and in order to account for one absurdity, theologians have invented another; having created one difficulty, they are forced to make a second, in order to escape from the first. So they represent God as loving sinners, and desiring to forgive and welcome them. This feeling is the Mercy of God; but, in opposition to the dictates of Mercy, Justice starts up, and forbids any favour to the sinner unless its own claims are first satisfied to the utmost. A Christian writer has represented Mercy and Justice as standing before the Eternal: Mercy pleads for forgiveness and pity, Justice clamours for punishment. Two attributes of the Godhead are personified and placed in opposition to each other, and require to be reconciled. But when we remember that each personified quality is really but a portion, so to speak, of the Divine character, we find that God is divided against Himself. Thus this theory introduces discord into the harmonious mind which inspires the perfect melodies of the universe. It sees warring elements in the Serenity of the Infinite One; it pictures successive waves of love and anger ruffling that ineffable Calm; it imagines clouds of changing motives sweeping across the sun of that unchanging Will. Such a theory as this must be rejected as soon as realised by the thoughtful mind. God is not a man to be swayed first by one motive, and then by another. His mercy and justice ever point unwaveringly in the same direction: perfect justice requires the same as perfect mercy. If God's justice could fail, the whole moral universe

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would be in confusion, and that would be the greatest cruelty that could be inflicted on intelligent beings. The weak pliability, miscalled mercy, which is supposed to be worked upon by a mediator, is a human infirmity which men have transferred to their idea of God.

A man who has announced his intention to punish may be persuaded out of his resolution. New arguments may be adduced for the condemned one's innocence, new reasons for clemency may be suggested; or the judge may have been over-strict, or have been swayed by prejudice. Here a mediator may indeed step in, and find good work to do; but, in the name of the Eternal Perfection, what has all this to do with the judgment of God? Can His knowledge be imperfect, His mercy increased? Can His sentence be swayed by prejudice, or made harsh by over-severity? But if His judgment is already perfect, any change implies imperfection, and all left for the mediator to do is to persuade God to make a change, *i.e.*, to become imperfect; or, God having decided that sin shall be punished, the mediator steps in, and actually so works upon God's feelings that He revokes His decision, and—most cruel of mercies—lets it go unnoticed. Like an unwise parent, God is persuaded not to punish the erring child. But such is not the case. God is just, and because He is just He is most truly merciful: in that justice rests the certainty of the due punishment of sin, and, therefore of the purification of the sinner; and no mediator—thanks be to God for it!—shall ever cause to waver for one instant that Rock of Justice on which reposes the hope of Humanity.

But the theory we are considering has another fatal error in it: it ascribes imperfection to Almighty God. For God is represented as desiring to forgive sinners, and this desire must be either right or wrong. If it be right, it can at once be gratified; but if Justice opposes this forgiveness, then the desire to forgive is not wholly right. Theologians are thus placed in this

dilemma : if God is perfect—as He is—any desire of His must likewise be flawlessly perfect, and its fulfilment must be the very best thing that could happen to His whole creation ; on the other hand, if there is any barrier of right—and Justice *is* right—interposed between God and His desire, then His Will is not the most perfect Good. Theologians must then choose between admitting that the desire of God to welcome sinners is just, or detracting from the Eternal Perfection.

It is obvious that we do not weaken our case by admitting, for the moment, the Deity of Jesus ; for we are striking at the root-idea of mediation. That the mediator should be God is totally beside the question, and in no way strengthens our adversaries' hands. His Deity does nothing more than introduce a new element of confusion into the affair ; for we become entangled in a maze of contradictions. God, who is One, even according to Christians, is at one and the same time estranged from sinners, pleading for sinners, and admitting the pleading. God pleads to Himself—but we are confounding the persons : one God pleads to another—but we are dividing the substance. Alas and alas for the creed which compels its votaries to deny their reason, and degrade their Maker ! which babbles of a Nature it cannot comprehend, and forces its foolish contradictions on indignant souls ! If Jesus be God, his mediation is at once impossible and unnecessary ; if he be God, his will is the will of God ; and if he wills to welcome sinners, it is God who wills to welcome them. If he, who is God, is content to pardon and embrace, what further do sinners require ? Christians tell us that Jesus is one with God : it is well, we reply ; for you say he is the Friend of sinners, and the Redeemer of the lost. If he be God, we both agree as to the friendliness of God to sinners. You need no mediator between you and Jesus ; and, since he is God, you need no media-

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tor with God. This reasoning is irrefragable, unless Christians are content to assign to their mediator some place which is less than divine; for they certainly derogate from his dignity when they imagine him as content to receive those whom Almighty God chases from before His face. And in making this difference between Jesus and the Father they make a fatal admission that he is distinct in feeling from God, and therefore cannot be the One God. It is the proper perception of this fact which has introduced into the Roman Church the human mediators whose intercession is constantly implored. Jesus, being God, is too awful to be approached: his mother, his apostles, some saint or martyr, must come between. I have read a Roman Catholic paper about the mediation of Mary which would be accepted by the most orthodox Protestant were Mary replaced by Jesus, and Jesus by the Father. For Jesus is there painted, as the Father is painted by the orthodox, in stern majesty, hard, implacable, exacting the uttermost farthing; and Mary is represented as standing between him and the sinners for whom she pleads. It is only a further development of the idea which makes the man Jesus the Mediator between God and man. As the deification of Mary progresses, following in slow but certain steps the deification of Jesus, a mediator will be required through whom to approach *her*; and then Jesus, too, will fade out of the hearts of men, as the Father has faded out of the hearts of Christians, and this superstition of mediation will sink lower and lower, till it is rejected by all earnest hearts, and is loathed by human souls which are aching for the living God.

We see, then, that mediation implies an absurd and inexplicable change in the supposed attitude of God towards man, and destroys all confidence in the justice of the Supreme Ruler. We should further take into consideration the strange feeling towards the Universal

Heart implied in man's endeavour to push some one in between himself and the Eternal Father. As we study Nature and try to discover from its workings something of the characteristics of the Worker therein, we find not only a ruling Intelligence—a *Supreme Reason*, before which we bow our heads in an adoration too deep for words, but we catch also beautiful glimpses of a ruling Love—a *Supreme Heart*, to which our hearts turn with a glad relief from the dark mysteries of pain and evil which press us in on every side. Simple belief in God at all, that is to say, in a Power which works in the Universe, is quite sufficient to disperse any of that feeling of fear which finds its fit expression in the longing for a mediator. For being placed here without our request, and even without our consent, we have surely, as a simple matter of justice, a right to demand that the Power which placed us here shall provide us with means by which we can secure our happiness. I speak, of course, as of a *conscious* Power, because a blind Force is necessarily irresponsible; but those who believe in a God are bound to acknowledge that He is responsible for their well-being. If any one should suggest that to say thus, is to criticise God's dealings and to speak with presumptuous irreverence, I retort that the irreverence lies with those who ascribe to the Supreme a course of action towards His creatures that they themselves would be ashamed to pursue towards their own children, and that they who fling at us the reproach of blasphemy because we will not bow the knee before their idol, would themselves lie open to the charge, were it not that their ignorance shields them from the sterner censure. All good in man—poor shallow streamlet though it be—flows down from the pure depths of the Fountain of Good, and any throb of love on earth is a pulsation caused by the ceaseless beating of the Universal Father-Heart. Yet men fear to trust that Heart, lest it should cease beating; they fear to rest on God, lest

He should play them false. When will they catch even a glimpse of that great ocean of love which encircles the universe as the atmosphere the earth, which is infinite because God is infinite. If there is no spot in the universe of which it can be said, "God is not here," then is there also no spot where love does not rule; if there is no life existing without the support of the Life-Giver and the Life-Sustainer, then is there also no life which is not cradled in the arms of Love. Who then will dare to push himself in between man and a God like this? In the light of the Universal Reason and the Universal Heart mediation stands confessed as an impertinent absurdity. Away with any and all of those who interfere in the most sacred concerns of the soul, who press in between the Creator and His offspring; between the heart of man and the parent Heart of God. Whoever it may be, saint or martyr, or the king of saints and martyrs, Jesus of Nazareth, let him come down from a position which none can rightly hold. To elevate the noblest son of man into this place of mediator is to make him into an offence to his brethren, and to cause their love to turn into anger, and their reverence into indignation. If men persist in talking about the need of a mediator before they dare to approach God, we must remind them that, if there be a God at all, He *must* be just, and that, therefore, they are perfectly safe in His hands; if they begin to babble about forgiveness "*for the sake of Jesus Christ,*" we must ask them what in the world they mean by the "forgiveness of sin?" Surely they do not think that God is like man, quick to revenge affront and jealous of His dignity; even were it possible for man to injure, in any sense, the Majesty of God, do they conceive that God is an irascible and revengeful Potentate? Those who think thus of God can never—I assert boldly—have caught the smallest glimpse of *God*. They may have seen a "magnified man," but they have seen nothing more;

they have never prostrated themselves before that Universal Spirit who dwells in this vast universe; they have never felt their own littleness in a place so great. How *can* sin be forgiven? can a past act be undone, or the hands go back on the sun-dial of Time? All God's so-called chastisements are but the natural and inevitable results of broken laws, laws invariable in their action, neither to be escaped or defied. Obedience to law results in happiness, and the suffering consequent on the transgression of law is not inflicted by an angry God, but is the simple natural outcome of the broken law itself. Put your hand in the fire, and no mediator can save you from burning; cry earnestly to God to save you, and then cast yourself from a precipice, and will a mediator come between you and the doom you have provoked? We should do more wisely if we studied laws and tried to conform ourselves to them, instead of going blundering about with our eyes shut, trusting that some one will interpose to shield us from the effects of our own folly and stupidity. Happily for mankind, mediation is impossible in that beautiful realm of law in which we are placed; when men have quite made up their minds that their happiness depends entirely on their own exertions, there will at last be some chance for the advancement of Humanity, for then they will work for things instead of praying for them. It is of real practical importance that this Christian notion of mediation should be destroyed, because on it hang all the ideas about trusting to some one else to do our own work. *This plan has not answered*: we judge it by results, and it has failed. Surely we may hope that as men get to see that prayer has not succeeded in its efforts to "move the arm which moves the world, to bring salvation down," they may turn to the more difficult, but also the more hopeful task, of moving their own arms to work out their own salvation. For the past, it *is* past, and none can reverse it; none can stay the

action of the eternal law which links sorrow with transgression, and joy and peace with obedience. When we slip back on our path upward, we may repent and call on God or man for forgiveness as we list, but only through toil and suffering can the lost way be recovered, and the rugged path must be trodden with bleeding feet ; for there is none who can lift the sinner over the hindrances he has built up for himself, or carry him over the rocks with which he has strewed his road.

Does the sentimental weakness of our age shrink from this doctrine, and whimper out that it is cold and stern. Ay, it is cold with the cold of the bracing sea-breeze, stringing to action the nerves enfeebled by hot-houses and soft-living ; ay, it is stern with the blessed sternness of changeless law, of law which never fails us, never varies a hair's breadth. But in that law is strength ; man's arm is feeble, but let him submit to the laws of steam, and his arm becomes dowered with a giant's force ; conform to a law and the mighty power of that law is on your side ; "humble yourself under the mighty hand of God," who is the Universal Law, "*and He shall lift you up.*"

So much for mediation. We turn with a still deeper repugnance to study the Christian idea of "Salvation." Mediation at least leaves us God, however it degrades and blasphemes Him, but salvation takes us altogether out of His Hands. Not content with placing a mediator between themselves and God, Christians cry out that He is still too near them ; they must push Him yet further back, they must have a Saviour too, through whom all His benefits shall filter.

"Saviour," is an expression often found in the Old Testament, where it bears a very definite and noble meaning. God is the Saviour of men from the power of sin, and although we may consider that God does *not* save from sin in this direct manner, we are yet

bound to acknowledge that there is nothing in this idea which is either dishonouring or repulsive. But the word "Saviour" has been degraded by Christianity, and the salvation He brings is not a salvation from sin. "The Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" is the Saviour of men, not because he delivers them from sin, but because he saves them from hell, and from the fiery wrath of God. Salvation is no longer the equivalent of righteousness, the antithesis of sin; in Christian life it means nothing more than the antithesis of damnation. It is true that Christians may retort that Jesus "saves his people from their sins;" we gladly acknowledge the nobleness and the beauty of many a Christian life, but nevertheless this is *not* the primary idea attached by popular Christianity to the word "salvation." "Being saved" is to be delivered out of "those hands of the living God," into which, as they are taught by their Bible, it is so fearful a thing to fall. "Being saved" is the *immediate* result of conversion, and is the opposite of "being lost." "Being saved" is being hidden "in the riven side of Jesus," and so preserved from the awful flames of the destroying wrath of God. Against all this we, believers in an Almighty Love, in a Universal Father, enter our solemn and deliberate protest, with a depth of abhorrence, with a passion of indignation which is far too intense to find any adequate expression in words. There is no language strong enough to show our deeply-rooted repugnance to the idea that we can be safer anywhere or at any time than we are already here; we cannot repel with sufficient warmth the officious interference which offers to take us out of the hands of God. To push some one in between our souls and Him was bad enough; but to go further and to offer us salvation from our Maker, to try and threaten us away from the arms of His Love, to suggest that another's hands are more tender, another's heart more loving than the Supreme Heart, these are blasphemies to which we will not

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listen in silence. It is true that to *us* these suggestions are only matters of laughter ; dimly as we guess at the Deity we know enough not to be afraid of Him, and these crude and childish conceptions about Him are among ourselves too contemptible to refute.

“ Non ragione di lor, mai guardo e passo.”

But we see how these ideas colour men's thoughts and lives, how they cripple their intellect and outrage their hearts, and we rise to trample down these superstitions, not because they are in themselves worth refuting, but simply because they degrade our brothermen. We believe in no wisdom that improves on Nature's laws, and one of those laws, written on our hearts, is that sorrow shall tread on the heels of sin. We are conscious that men should learn to welcome this law and not to shrink from it. To fly from the suffering following on broken law is the last thing we should do ; we ought to have no gratitude for a “ Saviour ” who should bear our punishment, and so cheat us out of our necessary lesson, turn us into spoiled children, and check our moral growth ; such an offer as this, could it really be made, ought to be met with stern refusal. We should trust the Supreme so utterly, and adore His wisdom with a humility so profound, that if we could change His laws we should not dare to interfere ; nor ought we, even when our lot is saddest, to complain of it, or do anything more than labour to improve it in steadfast obedience to law. We should ask for no salvation ; we should desire to fall—were it possible that we *could* be out of them—into the hands of God.

Further, is it impossible to make Christians understand that were Jesus all they say he is, we should still reject him ; that were God all they say He is, we would, in that case, throw back His salvation. For were this awful picture of a soul-destroying Jehovah, of a blood-craving Moloch, endowed with a cruelty

beyond human imagination, a true description of the Supreme Being, then would we take the advice of Job's wife, we would "curse God and die;" we would hide in the burning depths of His hell rather than dwell within sight of Him whose brightness would mock at the gloom of His creatures, and whose bliss would be a sneer at their despair. Were it thus indeed—

"O King of our salvation,
Many would curse to thee, and I for one!
Fling Thee Thy bliss, and snatch at Thy damnation,
Scorn and abhor the rising of Thy sun."

"Is it not worth while to believe," blandly urges a Christian writer, "if it is true, as it is true, that they who deny will suffer everlasting torments?" No! we thunder back at him, *it is not worth while*; it is not worth while to believe a lie, or to acknowledge as true that which our hearts and intellects alike reject as false; it is not worth while to sell our souls for a heaven, or to defile our honesty to escape a hell; it is not worth while to bow our knee to a Satan or bend our heads before a spectre. Better, far better, to "dwell with everlasting burnings" than to degrade our humanity by calling a lie, truth, and cruelty, love, and unreasonableness, justice; better to suffer in hell, than to have our hearts so hard that we could enjoy while others suffer; could rejoice while others are tormented, could sing alleluias to the music of golden harps, while our lyrics are echoed by the anguished wailing of the lost. God Himself—were He such as Christians paint Him—could not blot out of our souls our love of truth, of righteousness, of justice. While we have these we are *ourselves*, and we can suffer and be happy; but we cannot afford to pay down these as the price of our admission to heaven. We should be miserable even as we paced the golden streets, and should sit in tears beside the river of the water of life. Yet *this* is salvation; *this* is what Christians offer us in the name

of Jesus; *this* is the glad tidings brought to us as the gospel of the Saviour, as the "good news of God;" and this we reject, wholly and utterly, laughing it to scorn from the depths of our glad hearts which the Truth has made free; this we denounce, with a stern and bitter determination, in the name of the Universal Father, in the name of the self-reliance of humanity, in the name of all that is holy, and just, and loving.

But happily many, even among Christians, are beginning to shrink from this idea of salvation from the God in whom they say they place all their hopes. They put aside the doctrine, they gloss it over, they prefer not to speak of it. Free thought is leavening Christianity, and is moulding the old faith against its will. Christianity now hides its own cruel side, and only where the bold opponents of its creeds have not yet spread, does it dare to show itself in its real colours; in Spain, in Mexico, we see Christianity unveiled; here, in England, liberty is too strong for it, and it is forced into a semblance of liberality. The old wine is being poured into new bottles; what will be the result? We may, however, rejoice that nobler thoughts about God are beginning to prevail, and are driving out the old wicked notions about Him and His revenge. The Face of the Father is beginning, however dimly, to shine out from His world, and before the Beauty of that Face all hard thoughts about Him are fading away. Nature is too fair to be slandered for ever, and when men perceive that God and Nature are One, all that is ghastly and horrible must die and drop into forgetfulness. The popular Christian ideas of mediation and salvation must soon pass away into that limbo of rejected creeds which is being filled so fast; they are already dead, and their pale ghosts shall soon flit no longer to vex and harass the souls of living men.